

CANADA — ARMED FORCES — NAVY — Ref temp

# NAVAL WREN OFFICER

**WREN OFFICER:** A woman who holds the Queen's Commission and a position of authority in the Royal Canadian Navy.

## HISTORY AND IMPORTANCE

Women were first enrolled in the Royal Navy during the First World War to serve in an auxiliary service known as the Women's Royal Naval Service. It was from the abbreviation of this title, WRNS, that the women in the British Navy came to be known as "wrens".

This first women's naval service was limited in scope and numbers, but it played an important role in the war. Its members set the high standard of efficiency and devotion to duty that is the criterion of women's naval services today.

During the Second World War, there again arose an urgent need for women to replace the men of the Navy in certain types of jobs. In 1939, the British WRNS was re-established. At the height of the war, their numbers reached 75,000. These wrens performed many types of work ashore, and in some cases manned small harbour vessels. Many were decorated for bravery.

Canada also felt the need for a force of women during the war. In January 1942, under the guidance of British wren officers, recruiting for a Canadian force began. This force was known as the Women's Royal Canadian Naval Service, abbreviated to WRCNS, and its members were also known as wrens. More than 6,000 women were enrolled to serve in shore radio stations, hospitals, offices—wherever there was a job that could be done by women to release men for duty at sea. More than 500 served overseas. By their devotion to the service, by their pride in themselves and their uniform, these women established a reputation for high standards which earned them the respect of all who knew them. When the Second World War ended, the WRCNS was disbanded.

In 1951, during the Korean War, the need for a small women's naval force was again realized and it was decided to enrol a limited number of women into the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve to serve on a full-time basis. Four years later, in 1955, wrens were enrolled in the Royal Canadian Navy's regular force, opening a career opportunity to Canadian women for the first time.

Today, wrens provide the navy with a nucleus of well-trained women whose numbers could be expanded in the event of an emergency. Applicants are selected carefully.

## NATURE OF THE WORK

Most wren officers are employed in Halifax, Nova Scotia, the Navy's Atlantic Command. Here they support the fleet by their work in naval operations. There are also a limited number of appointments in personnel selection and administration in other naval establishments in Canada and abroad. Specialists may be employed in duties where their qualifications are of particular value.

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Wren officers in the field of naval operations plot the movements of naval ships and submarines, co-ordinate the berthing and fuelling of RCN and visiting naval ships, provide an information centre on movements of the fleet, and dispatch messages in preparation for visits of RCN ships to foreign ports. As part of their familiarization for this employment, wren officers often take flights in naval aircraft or day cruises in ships.

In some appointments, wren officers are Divisional Officers responsible for the conduct, morale and welfare of wrens in the non-commissioned ranks, and for the organization of recreational activities.

## WORKING CONDITIONS

A wren officer's working conditions and places of duty may vary greatly during her period of service. In some appointments, she will work in modern office buildings under much the same conditions as young women employed in industry or in commercial firms.

Some wren officers are employed in naval activities which have no parallel in civilian life, such as in naval operations centres where they use modern plotting and detection equipment related to the activities of warships at sea.

Wren officers normally work an eight-hour day, five days a week. However, in appointments as watchkeepers in naval operations centres, they will from time to time work irregular hours or in shifts.

Facilities and opportunities are available for sports and social and recreational activity. A wren officer is a member of the officers' mess (the wardroom) of the naval shore establishment where she is appointed.

## QUALIFICATIONS NECESSARY FOR ENTRY AND SUCCESS

To be enrolled as a wren officer in the Royal Canadian Navy, an applicant must be a Canadian citizen or a British subject resident in Canada with the status of a landed immigrant. She must be at least 21 and not more than 36



years of age, have a minimum educational standing of Senior Matriculation, be single on enrolment and meet the medical and aptitude standards of the Royal Canadian Navy.

## PREPARATION NEEDED

On entry into the RCN, a wren officer is required to complete a six-week Divisional Course at HMCS Cornwallis near Digby, Nova Scotia. Here she will learn naval customs, traditions and marks of respect. The training is designed to facilitate both the transition from civilian to service life and the development of leadership qualities.

The minimum educational standard is Senior Matriculation. University graduates have an advantage in that they serve a shorter time for their initial promotion. Experience on the executives of school committees, community clubs, Girl Guides and similar organizations which teach teamwork, self-discipline and leadership, is helpful in developing the qualities desired in a wren officer.

## EMPLOYMENT, ADVANCEMENT, OUTLOOK

A wren officer who enters the Royal Canadian Navy from civilian life is enrolled on a three-year Short Service Appointment with the rank of Acting Sub-Lieutenant. She may subsequently seek or be offered an extension of short service for one to three years if she has not applied for a permanent commission. A wren officer serving with a permanent commission undertakes to serve until she reaches retirement age, which is between 40 and 49 years of age, depending on rank.

Alternatively, an applicant may be enrolled in the Royal Canadian Naval Reserve and serve on Continuous Naval Duty. She may then apply for a Short Service Appointment in the regular force and ultimately a permanent commission. Those who serve only on Continuous Naval Duty are not eligible for pension.

During her first two years of service, a wren officer can expect to be appointed to watch-keeping duties at an operational headquarters in Halifax or Shelburne, Nova Scotia. Subsequently, she may hold administrative or personnel selection appointments in: Halifax or Cornwallis, Nova Scotia; Ottawa or Hamilton, Ontario, or Victoria, B.C. She may be appointed to serve in Britain or the United States with Canadian liaison staffs, or as an exchange officer. The duration of each appointment is normally two or three years.

Having entered as an Acting Sub-Lieutenant from shore (civilian life), a wren officer will be promoted to the confirmed rank of Sub-Lieutenant after one year if she has a university degree or otherwise after two years, subject to satisfactory demonstrated ability during this time in training courses and employment. After a minimum period of two years as a Sub-Lieutenant, a wren officer becomes eligible for selective promotion to the rank of Lieutenant. Promotion to Lieutenant-Commander, the next rank and the highest available to wren officers, is also by selection. Selective promotion depends on experience, training, demonstrated ability and the need for officers in higher rank.

If a wren officer marries but wishes to continue to serve, she may apply to remain in the navy.

## REMUNERATION

Remuneration as a wren officer is comparable to that paid women executives in civilian life.

The data contained in the following table includes basic pay plus subsistence allowances.

### *Annual Basic Pay Allowances*

Acting Sub-Lieutenant.....	\$3,720
Sub-Lieutenant.....	5,052-5,712
Lieutenant.....	6,276-7,236
Lieutenant-Commander.....	8,016-8,616

Other benefits include free medical and dental care, hospitalization and 30 days' leave annually on full pay plus time to travel for those stationed at a distance from their homes.

A pension plan on a contributory basis (6% of pay and allowances) provides security for a wren officer who makes the navy her career. At retirement age she will receive a life annuity of 2% of annual pay and allowances averaged over any six years she selects, multiplied by the number of years she has served (up to a maximum of 35 years). For instance, a wren Lieutenant-Commander who has served 25 years with at least six years in that rank will receive an annual pension of \$4,500. Her retirement will come at an age when she will still be able to take a civilian job to supplement her pension if she so desires.

## ADVANTAGES

A wren officer during her career can expect to serve in different localities, learning new work, meeting new people and seeing new places.

She will have employment and training of a type not available to the average Canadian woman and will enjoy the challenge of a unique, interesting and demanding career in positions of responsibility in the service of her country.

A wren officer will have ample leisure time for hobbies, sports and recreation in well-equipped naval establishments, and will enjoy a wide variety of social functions in officers' messes and clubs.

The free medical and dental care, 30 days' holidays with pay a year, and pension at an early age compare favourably with the benefits enjoyed by other Canadian women executives.

## DISADVANTAGES

As a member of an armed forces organization, a wren officer can expect to subordinate her own preferences and inclinations to the requirements of the navy. She will find that she has to accept changes of job and location, whether they are to her liking or not.

In some appointments, wren officers work irregular hours from time to time. For example, a wren officer will on occasion be required to be on duty over extended periods of time during the course of naval operations and exercises, resting and eating only when the opportunity presents itself. A wren officer in charge of wrens is required to sacrifice a certain degree of her personal time to their welfare.

A wren officer is part of what is essentially a man's world; discretion and tact are required.



## HOW TO GET STARTED TOWARD THE OCCUPATION

A young woman who wishes to obtain further information or to apply for entry into the Royal Canadian Navy as a wren officer should visit or write the Naval Recruiting Officer in one of the following cities:

Victoria, B.C.	Fort William, Ont.	North Bay, Ont.
Vancouver, B.C.	Windsor, Ont.	Montreal, P.Q.
Calgary, Alta.	London, Ont.	Quebec City, P.Q.
Edmonton, Alta.	Hamilton, Ont.	Saint John, N.B.
Regina, Sask.	Toronto, Ont.	Charlottetown, P.E.I.
Saskatoon, Sask.	Kingston, Ont.	Halifax, N.S.
Winnipeg, Man.	Ottawa, Ont.	St. John's, Nfld.

## RELATED OCCUPATIONS

Junior wren officers employed in administrative duties can be compared to women who are personal assistants to executives in business or administrative secretaries in schools and industry.

Duties of a divisional officer in the navy can be compared to those of personnel officers in business, including some aspects of social work and of supervision in a girls' residence.

Personnel selection officers are equivalent to counselors in business and schools who are trained to test, interview and classify personnel for suitable employment.

Senior officers employed in administration duties are equivalent to women holding responsible executive positions in civilian life.

There is no occupation in civilian life which duplicates that of a wren officer in naval operations. This entails working in communication with surface ships, submarines and coastal air defence units, or operating tactical trainers which prepare ships' officers for duty at sea.

## FOR FURTHER READING

**BOOKS:** *The Far Distant Ships*. By Joseph Schull, Queen's Printer, Ottawa.

*Blue for a Girl*. By John Drummond, W. A. Allen, London.

*Blue Tapestry*. By Dame Vera Laughton Mathews. (Out of print but available in some public libraries).

**PERIODICALS:** *The Crownsnest*, (Monthly). The Royal Canadian Navy's Magazine. Queen's Printer, Ottawa.

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This occupational information monograph was published in May, 1964. It was prepared by Naval Headquarters, Ottawa, and is one of a series on occupations in the Royal Canadian Navy.



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